

Testimony concerning Raised Bill No. 6499  
"An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes"  
The Rev. Timothy Oslovich, Chairperson  
Connecticut Coalition to Save Darfur  
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Good morning, Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Stillman, and members of the Committee. My name is Tim Oslovich. I am a pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Vernon, Connecticut, and I currently serve as the Chairperson of the Connecticut Coalition to Save Darfur. I have been involved in advocacy on behalf of the people of Darfur and Sudan for about five years, calling on leaders in the United States and the United Nations to end the genocide there. The issue of genocide has been very important to my faith community, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which has made working to end the genocide in Darfur one of its advocacy priorities. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify in regard to a section of An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes, House Bill 6499.

Thank you for introducing this important piece of legislation. The issue of genocide is one that desperately needs to be addressed in our educational system in order to empower students to prevent future atrocities. All religious traditions and people of conscience recognize that genocide is one of the worst crimes that plagues humanity. Genocide goes beyond murder and torture in that genocide is the attempt not only to kill individuals but to eradicate an entire group of people based on their ethnicity, race, nationality or religious affiliation. As you know, genocide is the horrific crime of attempting to kill an entire group of people just because of their identity.

Historically, little has been done to prevent the crime of genocide or to stop a genocide once it had begun. Most countries and individuals have stood by as genocide was committed. The twentieth century includes many instances of genocide: The Herero and Namaqua, Armenia, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia, Burundi, Rwanda, and we are currently seeing the terrible effects of the first genocide of the twenty-first century in Darfur, Sudan. Many people are unaware of any cases of genocide aside from the Holocaust. Since many people do not know that genocide has been committed repeatedly in the past and continues to be a threat today, they are ill-equipped to work for an end to genocide.

Thankfully, this legislation is a small first step in addressing this problem. It is an urgent problem. Genocide has claimed the lives of millions of people, destroyed cultures and left entire countries devastated. It is only by educating our children that we give them the tools they need to work against genocide. I am happy to see that under the proposed legislation, genocide education would be added to the specific topics for which the State Board of education would be required to provide curricular resources. However, I see this as only a first step toward requiring genocide education in Connecticut schools. As you know, teachers have many subjects that they are required to teach, and those which are not required are rarely covered. Genocide education is important enough to

be required in our schools. As has been clearly shown, when it is done well, genocide education has a profound character-forming effect on students and helps them to become better citizens and more responsible members of society. Teachers have expressed a desire for training so that they can appropriately teach what is obviously a very difficult and disturbing topic. Quite simply, in order to do a good job of providing genocide education to Connecticut's students, we need a mandate as well as additional training for teachers. We are hopeful that in future years, when there is not a budget crisis, these steps will be taken.

Genocide education is such a crucial issue that a mandate and additional teacher training resources are appropriate and necessary. We have significant local resources, such as the University of Connecticut, to aid in the assembly of curriculum and training. In addition, there are other organizations, such as Facing History and Ourselves, which have already developed excellent genocide education curriculum which is available free. Costs would be minimal without sacrificing the quality of the materials and training.

In 2007 and 2008, I was able to travel to Rwanda. I visited the genocide memorial in Kigali where 259,000 people are buried. I also visited another memorial: the small Catholic church in Ntarama. The bones of the 5,000 people who were killed there are laid neatly on shelves, and all the items they brought into the church when they sought refuge there are stacked near the front of the building. It is a very disturbing place; a sanctuary was turned into a slaughterhouse. As a parent, one item particularly struck me: a red sippy cup with a white top spattered with blood. To the genocidaires, that small child was just one more "cockroach" to be killed, but that child was just as precious as yours or mine.

Chairwoman Stillman, Chairman Fleischmann, members of the Committee, we have an obligation to those who have suffered and died in past genocides, not only to remember them but also to work for an end to genocide. In a democracy like ours, the way that action begins is by educating citizens so that they can make informed and responsible decisions and take appropriate action. The way that the world begins to change is by educating our children to live differently. "Never again" will only become a reality once our citizens know the past and are empowered to make the future different. Genocide education is a step in that direction.

Thank you.